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Resnick Paintings [Review of Resnick Exhibit at the Milwaukee Art Center, Milwaukee]

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Resnick paintings

by Curtis L. Carter

Born in a revolutionary year, 1917, in Bratislava, Russia, the artist Milton Resnick has become a major force in the art revolution that led to the prominence of American Abstract Expressionist paintings of the '50's and '60's.

With Jackson Pollock, Wilhelm de Kooning, and others, Resnick contributed to the destruction of the identifiable pictorial image.

What remains is nicely stated in the current Resnick Exhibit at the Milwaukee Art Center thru January 23.

Giant 8x17 foot canvases covered with virtually unanalyzable color fields offer the viewer a powerful sense of color and space. Sheer size alone is impressive, but it is only the beginning. An experience of being "taken over" by one of the massive structures provides a unique visual exploration.

A viewer fortunate enough to be in the gallery on a certain Saturday morning could have heard the artist relating the "story" of "Here I Remember." He said:

"When I was a little boy just new in this country, I felt as though everybody was looking at me because I was foreign. I would always have the feeling that someone was going to get me. One nice summer day I wanted to go to the candy shop, which was the only bright spot in my life then. I looked down the street

to see if anyone was there.

"The street was bare so I ran and reached the shop without seeing anyone. I went in and bought a nice big piece of candy with my penny and left the shop. While walking down the street, I had the feeling someone was going to get me and take my candy. So I ran and hid under a tree.

"While I was standing under the tree I was terrified because I knew someone was in the tree and was coming down to get me. When I looked up, I saw nothing but leaves and terror. This painting is how I remember it as being."

But if there are relevant stories connected with the other paintings, they cannot be read from the paintings themselves, which are the ultimate in abstraction.

Works in the exhibit show a progression, which divides roughly into four groupings. 1957 works such as "Winged Horse" make slight concessions to the past through their more demarcated shapes and traceable linear paths.

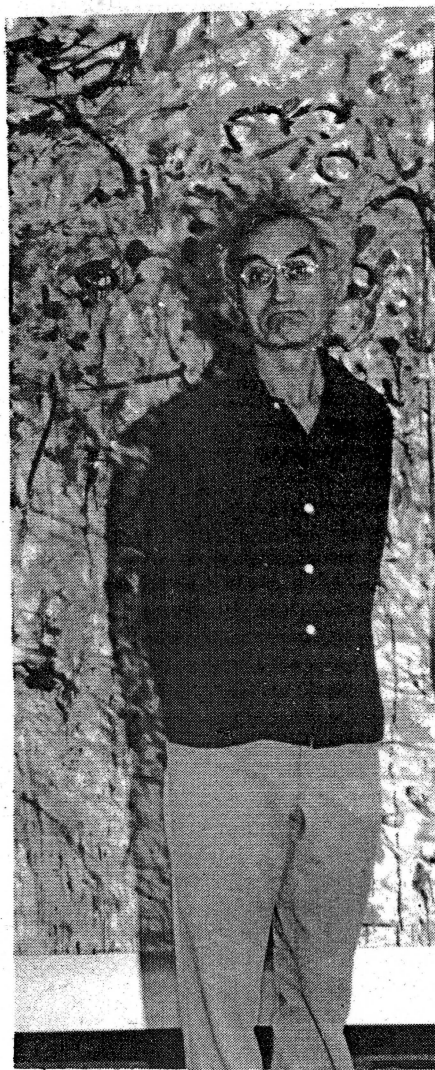
"Tilt to the Land" and "Genie," of the 1959 period, exhibit marked change

in direction. Ribbony strokes in softer pastel greens and pinks loosen the structure and complete the disintegration of closed shapes on the canvas.

The quieter surfaces give way to thick and crusty canvases of heavy carpet-like paint in the 1961-63 works of "Leaving Color," and "New Bride."

Highly luminous surfaces connect these and the most recent works of 1970-71: "Debris," "No Weather," and "Pink Fire." These are remarkable for color resolution. Alternatively, they encompass dark and somber tones as in "No Weather," lighter pastel shades in "Debris," and rich pink-reds perhaps reflecting the exposure to the desert tones of the New Mexico setting where the latest works were produced.

Resnick has continued to work in a style which, due to the onrush of pop art, the color field school, minimal art, conceptual art and new realism, has become "out of fashion." Opinions will vary as to whether he has advanced the style into a more mature statement or carries it into lyric decadence. I favor the former view.



Resnick in front of "Swan"